

**Hannah Lotte Lund**

**On the Diversity  
of Human Languages Constructions...  
Spain and the Spaniards in the Travel Writings  
of Alexander, Wilhelm and Caroline von Humboldt  
and their Reflections in the Berlin Republic  
of Letters Around 1800**

The objects with which we are acquainted only by the animated narratives of travellers, have a particular charm; imagination wanders with delight over what is vague and undefined.

Alexander von Humboldt 1818<sup>1</sup>

One must have a special intention or, like me, must be thrown into this country by coincidence, to find this end of the world particularly interesting.

Wilhelm von Humboldt 1799

The starting point for this research were the intellectual networks of 18th century Berlin and especially the Jewish Salons with their multiple inner-German and international connections. Given the often stated renewed interest in Spain among German intellectuals around 1800 and the high level of intellectual exchange in the city of Berlin, which called itself the capital of Enlightenment, one might have assumed, and also my “imagination wandered with delight” over the idea, that quite a number of the members of the Berlin Republic of Letters at that time would have dealt considerably with Spain. In short, they did not. Despite quite a few personal bonds to the Iberian Peninsula, the Berlin intellectual elite around 1800 gave Spain not much of a debate. Among those few who dealt with this part of Europe academically, were Wilhelm, Alexander and Caroline von Humboldt, who went to Spain on different motives around 1800 – years before the War of Independence brought Spain back to the mind

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1 All translations in this text are my own – H.L.L.

of the general public. It can be asked therefore whether these undertakings of the Humboldts, who were actively networking agents of Berlin's intellectual circles, influenced the public opinion in their home town. As they were closely related to each other and partially had the same educational background, they also form a promising micro group for research on their motives, on their pre-departure knowledge and on the perception of "the other" in their travel reports and in the minds of their readers.

The central question of this essay is: in what sense did Wilhelm, Alexander and Caroline von Humboldt consider themselves and acted as scientific travellers and how is this concept reflected in their travel reports?

Secondly, I ask: what made Spain their country of interest and how was this destination discussed in the Berlin society?

The term travel report is used here by broadening the definition of Holger Kürbis according to which *Reisebericht* can refer to all text forms that document the course *and the results* of the journey, including journals, diaries, letters and reports (Kürbis 2004: 34). In this sense, all three Humboldts have left travel reports and Alexander von Humboldt not only can be seen as Germany's first independent scientific traveller, but also as the author who set up a new tradition of scientific travel report.

As travelogue to compare to Carl Schwartz was chosen, a hitherto unknown printer who published his autobiography under the title: *Wahre und abenteuerliche Lebensgeschichte eines Berliners, der in den Kriegsjahren 1807 bis 1815 in Spanien, Frankreich und Italien sich befand* (The true and adventurous life story of a Berliner who travelled to Spain, France and Italy during the last war). Though rather a member of the aspiring middle class and not of the well educated elite as the Humboldts, Schwartz becomes interesting, as he grew up literarily in the same streets as the Humboldts and on the first page declares himself proudly a pupil of Frederic the Great (Schwartz 1921: 5). All four lived and worked a considerable life-span in Berlin and all four went to Spain at some stage, and not only to Spain, and they had parts of their experiences published. Schwartz's book is used here as a reminder that academic travelling to regions as distant as Spain around 1800 has to be considered as an elite phenomenon. Preparing for and undertaking such a journey required time and

money, and neither one of the Humboldts could have done so without a rich inheritance which let them plan independently and gave them the leisure for contemplation and scientific analysis.

Theoretically, the characteristics that make a journey scientific can be found 1) in the motive and preparation of a journey, 2) in the observations and methods applied during the travel and 3), of course, in the format and the contents of the outcome, the travel reports. It is not my intention here to give an analysis even of only one of the Humboldtian *oeuvres*, but to compare the four travel reports only according to the characteristics given above and to focus on one geographic phenomenon that has been visited by all travellers, the Montserrat, and one topic very popular around 1800, the National Character.

### 1. The Spanish Body of Art – Motives

Starting with the motive, it must be said that to all chosen travellers Spain came by coincidence.

Alexander von Humboldt has sometimes been depicted as a born or romantic traveller *par excellence* (Montesinos Sirera/Renn 2004) because of his holistic view of nature, but also because the desire to travel can be traced back to his early youth, as he himself remarks at several points in his works. His writings speak of his “unshakeable conviction to travel” abroad since he was a teenager (to Karl Ludwig Wildenow, 20.12.1796; in: Humboldt 1999: 9) and also of an adventurous spirit: “From my earliest youth I had felt an ardent desire to travel into distant regions, which Europeans had seldom visited” (Humboldt/Bonpland 1972: 3). To this end he had continuously tried to find an expedition or travelling companions to the South and East and had changed his plans according to the political situation. When he finally spent the five months before his departure to Latin America, January to June 1799, in Spain, this stay was only the last of quite a few travel concepts. “Since his youth” he had first planned to go to the West Indies, then to Africa, then he had an offer to go to Egypt, for which he prepared by reading ancient literature. After all this was hindered by the Napoleonic wars, he had set up his mind to join the big French expedition by Captain Baudin. When this was also delayed due to a budgetary veto by the Directoire, he and his companion Aimé Bonpland decided very suddenly to go to Spain and to embark the

next possible ship. "Cruelly deceived in his plans" Humboldt looked for the "speediest means of quitting Europe" (Humboldt/Bonpland 1972: 8).

So, notwithstanding that he was later enthusiastic about the warm welcome and the scientific spirit he met with in Spain, this was not at all a planned starting point of his world tour. While it was not a *travel destination*, it surely became a place for scientific research and *travel preparation*.

The same can be said of his brother Wilhelm and his wife. The elder Humboldt, devoted to the study of the Roman and the Greek, always had wanted to go to Italy, similar to his wife Caroline, née Dacheröden, who was especially interested in painting, and particularly in the Italian masters. Like Alexander, who had been planning to study the Italian volcanoes for years, and finally went to Paris to be close to the scene of political decision, they had chosen Paris as an intermediate place to live. Continuously hindered by the war to follow their dreams to Italy, and probably inspired by the reports of Alexander, they decided to "do Spain" in the second half of 1799. They left Paris in their own carriage in September 1799 and for the next seven months, although they were rather a slow caravan, travelled Spain in an "American tourist way", went to see all the big and small cities on their way from Barcelona to Madrid and Seville, back to Granada and to the coast, and always stayed only a few days.

Fascinated however by the national individuality of the Basques and especially by their language, Wilhelm von Humboldt decided to do a 2nd, rather a research trip on his own, to the French and Spanish Basque regions, which was realized in spring 1801. In his case, Spain became a travel destination while travelling it.

Of course a mercenary, a non free soldier, cannot decide the direction of his wanderings, but the mere possibility to see such a remarkable and exotic country as Spain was one of the most explicit arguments for Carl Schwartz to join the army at all. He had left his hometown on the day of the French occupation and wandered Europe looking for a job. Schwartz gives a kind of naïve but charming resume of his motives to join the anti-French troops:

Neither having money nor the hope to get some, I should make use of the opportunity to visit such a remarkable country as Spain! 6 years of military service is no eternity to a man of 21, and coming back I can always take part in the talk of the town (Schwartz 1921: 31-32).

## **2. “Collecting Material” – Scientific methods and ways of travelling**

There is seemingly no need to discuss the man who initiated the “scientific rediscovery of the New World” as scientific traveller in Spain. In spite of the rich and multidisciplinary research on the world traveller Alexander von Humboldt, his five month stay in Spain remained a blank spot for a long time until Sandra Rebok’s dissertation 2004 filled this gap. Additionally, over the last decade, the traveller who crossed borders between countries and genres with charm and ease, inspired modern researchers to do the same: several interesting exhibition and Internet projects have been launched lately that mirror Humboldt’s interest in international networking and scientific cooperation, also with Spain. Humboldt’s visit to Tenerife has been discussed as a turning point in the history of the reception of the Canary Islands: After Humboldt the islands “cease to be a passing place [...] to become an object of investigation” (Montesinos Sirera/Renn 2004). Still, the question can be asked, how, especially at the beginning of his world trip, Alexander von Humboldt perceived “the other”, also in comparison with his brother Wilhelm and the wife of the latter, with whom he spent much time in Paris shortly before he left for Spain. To what degree would the affinity to a certain science or art influence their perception of the country?

The scientific character of Alexander von Humboldt’s enterprise is already reflected in the quality and the amount of baggage for such an undertaking: Preparing his expedition, until 1799 and especially in Spain he had studied several natural sciences, and exercised the handling of all types of scientific instruments: telescopes, quadrants and sextants, compasses and chronometers, thermometers and barometers, magnetometers and hygrometers, microscopes, electrometers, an eudiometer to measure the purity of the air and even a cyanometer with which to judge the blue coloration of the sky. All these instruments went with him on tour. Later in his life he should admit that he “could not live without experiments” (Montesinos Sirera/Renn 2004). Which

is probably why in his travel report on Spain he dedicated more lines to his instruments than to the books he read in Spain or any other personal impressions. He used his time in Spain practically, to find out which of his instruments appeared to be the most exact and the least subject to break in the carriage, but also enjoyed the museums and botanical gardens, where he learned a lot about the colonies. Not without pride Humboldt later stated: "I employed myself in ascertaining by astronomical methods the position of several important points for the geography of Spain" (Humboldt/Bonpland 1972: 12).

To Humboldt and Bonpland all the places visited became places of experiment: They went from Barcelona via Montserrat, Sagunt and Valencia to Madrid, from there with many little stopovers to Aranjuez und La Coruña. While in every place geographical, geological and climatological measurements took place, he used his stay in Madrid to prepare his journey also diplomatically. As in all the places he visited during his travels, also in Spain he tried to get in contact with the leading scientists of his time, e.g. the chemist Joseph Louis Proust or the mineralogist Christian Herrgen. With the help of the Saxon diplomat Philip von Forell he got in contact with Don Mariano Luis de Urquijo, who presented them to King Charles IV and his wife. It has been suggested that the king wished to regain control over his colonies and was hoping that Humboldt might help him (Pratt 1992: 116.). But there surely was a certain amount of scientific interest or at least curiosity on part of the king. As Humboldt writes to Christian Focke: "The Catholic King was overcome by an enormous curiosity that a traveller from the far north was eager to visit the other part of his kingdom" (26.03.1799, in: Humboldt 1999: 16).

If a scientific traveller can be judged by the seriousness of his endeavour, this was documented in his very passport, in which Humboldt had the king insert a special paragraph describing and authorizing "all operations which I should judge useful for the progress of the sciences" (Humboldt/Bonpland 1972: 15).

Also, to obtain this passport Humboldt had prepared for minister de Urquijo an autobiographical sketch in which he portrayed himself as an experienced interdisciplinary scientist.

On a lower level of travelling one also had to be "diplomatic in paper work". Given that passports were enormously expensive and an ordinary workman could not even afford the passport from Berlin to

Leipzig, the young printer Schwartz made use of his eraser several times, and modified his destination (Schwartz 1921: 25). According to the needs of the day and the wishes of his employees he became a Bavarian, then a Frenchman – he had learnt enough French to pass as French national –, then a Catholic (because only catholic soldiers were allowed in the Swiss army). Yet, the choice of destination never was his own.

In comparison with the scientific journey of the trained mining specialist and scientific traveller Alexander and his companion the botanist Bonpland, the trip of Wilhelm and Caroline von Humboldt during the years 1799 and 1800 has often been said to be a family undertaking. But that would not be the whole truth. Despite their “touristy” attitude, both Wilhelm and Caroline von Humboldt acted as professional travellers with well articulated scientific and artistic interests.

The management of the trip alone had to be professional of some sort: Caroline had to organize six mules and many carriages, cope with two servants, three children of the age of seven, five and two years and a pregnancy that was only discovered while on tour. Yet her trip could also be named scientific in spirit: She was determined to prepare for Goethe nothing less than a complete overview about the “Spanish body of art”, which means she had a wanting and very educated reader in mind, for whom she worked out texts in detail. Goethe had explicitly asked both Wilhelm and Caroline to make it their “business” to write down their impressions of the Spanish art “be it old or modern pieces, so we could get to know what is to be found in Spain and what form the Spanish body of art might have. It would make a nice contribution for the *Propyläen*” (to Wilhelm von Humboldt, 26.5.1799, in: Bratranek 1876: 76). As her husband reports, in November 1799 Caroline had already worked out 250 (!) articles on what both repeatedly called the “most surprising treasure of wonderful paintings” in Spain – of which, unfortunately, only eleven are known today. She planned to later add biographical information about the artists and then to discuss with Goethe the best format for publication.

The impression the Spanish art collections, especially the royal collection in the Escorial, made on both Humboldts, is reflected also in their letters and diaries.

Wilhelm von Humboldt felt the need to correct the travel books he read by stating that the collection of paintings in this country is “the most important thing about a journey to Spain” (to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 28.11.1799, in: Bratranek 1876: 147), and to his friend Christian G. Körner he writes: “The Spanish school, which is here almost as unknown as in our country, has its own beauty [...] but you have to see some pieces yourself to get an idea of it” (to Körner 30.05.1800, quoted in: Noehles-Doerk 1996: 164). As Caroline’s husband wrote to Goethe, it was a very exhausting job, but “her work is dedicated to you, and the idea to do you a favour, enhances her patience and diligence” (28.11.1799, in: Bratranek 1876: 147).

The amount of time invested also speaks of a professional attitude: Caroline did not simply take the opportunity to visit the art collections they came across, she also put lots of effort in getting an overview, spent much money on tips for the owners of private collections and even asked the king for a royal permission to visit a friary to which women were not normally allowed. She got it and, as she reports, “her assiduité to see the pictures made the monks cry” when she left (to Karl Friedrich von Dacheröden, 11.11.1799, in: Hettler 2001: 92).

She literally spent all her time with art collections. For example, when they had to wait for the audience at the Court she spent the ten days solely with the portraits at the Escorial. She, too, had a professional to help her, as she made her childrens’ supervisor, the engraver Georg Christian Gropius, her assistant.

Contrary to his wife, Wilhelm von Humboldt had officially distanced himself from “scientific travelling” and was dealing only with “impressions”. In the letter to Goethe, which was later to become the article about the Montserrat, he contemplated intensively on the role of impressions on a traveller. Thereby he reflected the tension that arises between the expectation of the educated traveller and his wish to act as *tabula rasa* and impartial:

Entering a foreign country a traveller is confronted with many questions that might be relevant in future and he spends his time finding answers to them and my own experience taught me that in doing so one often missed what can’t be redone later. It’s too easily forgotten that travelling – with the exception of scientific travels – is a part of one’s active life dedicated only to watching, strolling around, meeting and talking with people, to living and enjoying and getting impressions and preserving the impressions you got (Humboldt 1981b: 61).



This text has been evaluated as a change of paradigm in the history of the perception of the other: it is no longer asked to understand and explain the qualities of the other, but to contemplate on the limits of one's perception (Zimmermann 1997: 2). Yet it also must be seen in connection with his travel impressions in his diary and his acting as a traveller. Humboldt had left this "business" of describing the arts to his wife, because, as he told Goethe, he considered his own eye less trained, but in his diary lots of impressions about the Spanish arts and architecture can be found containing independent and firm judgments. Wilhelm von Humboldt spent the year between his first and second Spanish journey in the libraries learning Spanish, Basque and working on the history of these peoples, talking to historians and politicians he knew. His eagerness was so intense and seen as weird, that rumours of his interest reached to Spain before he did. When he crossed the border to Spain a second time, he was welcomed with "you are the one who is interested in our language" and as he wrote to Caroline, he was looked at as a *Wundertier*, a miraculous animal.

Humboldt was also serious about the "business" of travelling: On his way to Spain he carried not only Bourgoing's work with him, but also personal recommendations by the author, whom he had met several times in Paris. From his letter to Goethe we know that he at least had read Christian Fischer's travel report and in his diary he makes frequent use of Antonio Ponz.

In some sense the Humboldts had prepared themselves for travelling to Spain also with classical literature. When climbing the Montserrat, Humboldt had Goethe's verse in his mind and Caroline assured Schiller's wife that "Don Carlos" was with them and repeatedly read (to Charlotte von Schiller, 25.11.1799, in Hettler 2001: 94). In other words, both Caroline and Wilhelm von Humboldt's travels to Spain reveal the intense relation between travelling and literature, "mind-travelling", or "reading a country like a book". They maybe unintentionally compared their impressions not only to elder travel literature, but also to literary visions. While the soldier Schwartze was happy about the inexpensive apricots and oranges available everywhere, and Alexander enjoyed the magnificent vegetation, for Wilhelm and Caroline von Humboldt an orange tree immediately associated Goethe's "Wilhelm Meister": Only in Spain, Caroline wrote to Weimar, she understood what Goethe's Mignon's Song really meant: "When I saw

the first orange trees in Cordoba, I started singing: Knows't thou the land [where lemon-trees do bloom// and oranges like gold in leafy gloom]" (to Charlotte von Schiller, 26.3.1800, in: Hettler 2001: 96). It should be remarked at this point that Alexander, too, sometimes refers in his letters to non scientific literature, e.g. when he compares Tenerife to the *glückselige Inseln* (happy islands), a book by Wilhelm Heinse.

It can be said there is a certain ambivalence in Wilhelm von Humboldt's philosophy on travelling: his general contemplative approach to travelling as part of a philosophical life contrasts with his drive for understanding and finding information about a certain people.

From the very beginning Wilhelm von Humboldt was convinced that this first trip to Spain meant the most to him on a personal level, by adding a lot to his knowledge of man or *Menschenansicht* (to Gustav von Brinckmann, 05.12.1799, in Leitzmann 1939: 119). In contrast to that, the second trip was explicitly motivated by his interest in the Basque language. As he stated in the essay published many years later, considering the language of a people their liveliest imprint of its feeling and thinking, he studied proverbs as well as dances, music as well as poetry. During this 2nd stay, one might say, Wilhelm von Humboldt employed methods of oral history; he not only collected manuscripts, but talked to mayors and priests, went from village to village, asked women to sing their songs to write them down by hearing. At the same time, in his diaries, we will find descriptions of the shape of the bodies and the faces of men and women, and characters of all villages, climate notes and historical contemplations and drawings from agricultural specimens. Besides, the elder Humboldt was not only collecting impressions, he was also collecting "material". This was mainly due to his concept of the National Character.

### **3. Outcome – immediate, filtered and revised impressions, reactions in Berlin and Weimar**

Part of the success of Alexander von Humboldt as a networker in science was due to his amazing talents in public relations. While he was still on tour, he not only kept in touch with his friends and partners, but also with the public, who was informed about most of his experiences by some of his correspondents, who sent letters or quotes to

local newspapers. Readers of the *Neue Berliner Monatsschrift* in 1801 for example got to know that Humboldt thought of this people as the “noble Spanish Nation” (excerpt from a letter to Christian Gottlob Kunth, 04.04.1799, in Jahn/Lange 1973: 680). And to his banker and friend David Friedländer he sent this enthusiastic gesture of invitation: “Have a look at this part of the world I will pass through from California to Patagonia, while measuring and dismantling it. What a pleasure in this wonderfully huge and new nature!” (to David Friedländer, 11.04.1799, in Humboldt 1999: 17).

Letters had brought rumours of all Humboldts’ deeds quickly to Berlin, but their friends here could not always understand the impact of the latest news. While Wilhelm von Humboldt laid the foundation to historical analysis of the Basque people, in Berlin he was looked at as weird animal. In Weimar, Goethe literally followed their journey with the finger on a map he had fixed to the door of his study. His asking for the favour to be sent original impressions of Spain was just one example of the growing interest in Spain on behalf of the Weimar elite (Briesemeister/Wentzlaff-Eggebert 2003). In Berlin, Sara Levy, the hostess of a well known salon asked herself: why would one go to Spain? Wilhelm was known for his special taste, but “has this country anything that could interest Caroline? I don’t know why I find it difficult to imagine a journey to this dark and unenlightened country only relatively attractive”.<sup>2</sup> It cannot be said that the Berlin intellectual society had a dislike for Spain. They simply did not discuss it. This could be astounding, because of the many personal bonds: Henriette Herz, née de Lemos, one of the most famous *salonières*, who had studied languages with Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt, came from a Portuguese family and at least read Portuguese and Spanish. Though in later life she spent all her money travelling, she never thought of going to the Iberian Peninsula. Like most of her contemporaries with a favour for the classical period, Italy was her country of desire (Wilhelm von Humboldt however later thought she had Spanish looks and felt himself reminded of her features and black curls in Spain quite often). Similarly, Rahel Levin Varnhagen, life long hostess of the Humboldts, not only had members of the Spanish embassy

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2 Sara Levy to Gustav von Brinckmann, 16.04.1799, unpublished letter, Brinkmanska Arkivet, Uppsala.

among her guests, she later was engaged to Don Rafael de Urquijo, nephew of the famous minister of that name. They never discussed, to what we know, his country of origin. Even a few years later, when the personal bonds became stronger, Spain did not become much of a topic for the Berlin society. Though the Spanish embassy is mentioned as regular meeting point in the private correspondence of the diplomats Humboldt, Gentz and Brinckmann, Spanish politics are seemingly not talked about. The love affair between Varnhagen and Urquijo was generally associated to a special temper on both sides, but though his notorious jealousy led to the splitting up, Urquijo was not perceived as “a southerner” or even a foreigner.

Ironically one might say that the German literature owed something to the fact that Spain was considered a place of exile by Prussian diplomats, because when the poet Heinrich von Kleist in 1804 applied to the Government to be used in a state’s mission, and was offered a post as attaché in Spain, he had to refuse (as a matter of fact it would have been an expensive honour, an unpaid position thus far). Instead, he stayed in Germany and wrote the most famous of his dramas. When Peter Gualtieri, however, another salon-member who was appointed to the German embassy in Spain, met with catholic distrust because he was a protestant and died there under tragic circumstances, it did not cause much debate either. The travel books by Esther Gad alias Lucie Domeier, who published her travel report about the Peninsula in 1802, were almost certainly read by her friends in Berlin, especially as her former best friend, Rahel Levin Varnhagen was always supportive of the idea that women writers could excel in all genres men did. Unfortunately there is no record of the reception of this book.

Of course, in later years his Berlin friends went to hear his cosmos-lecture, Alexander von Humboldt was a very well established member of the Berlin society and was friends with Rahel and Karl August Varnhagen. But from what can be gathered from their private letters around 1800, before the Romantic turn and before the idea of Spain as paradise was popularised, Berlin’s society did not know much about Enlightenment in Spain, but rather used it as a metaphor. However, still in the 1820s Henriette Mendelssohn, the daughter of the famous philosopher, was asked: “Even if we now have Enlighten-

ment in Spain, please deal with this letter in Spanish method and – burn it”.<sup>3</sup>

This lack of information is probably the reason why in a long letter to David Friedländer, Wilhelm von Humboldt talks mostly about philosophy and Enlightenment in Spain. Friedländer was one of the most prominent and central figures of these circles, a successful merchant and influential representative of the Jewish Enlightenment, the *Haskalah*. Humboldt emphasizes how much Enlightenment he found among Spanish scholars, but, at the same time, makes this a relative statement, when he says there are “different stages of Enlightenment” and one cannot expect that Spain, being so influenced by the Inquisition and the religion, jumps to the top level at once. Yet he sees in Spain two symptoms of a beginning Enlightenment, or to use a modern phrase, ‘Enlightenment advanced level’: the hatred for the Inquisition and the independent thinking. Humboldt also excuses himself for writing so much about such a marginal country. “One must have a special intention or, like me, must be thrown into this country by coincidence, to find this end of the world particular interesting” (to David Friedländer, 16.12.1799, Humboldt 1981a: 186-195).

On the other hand it must be said that it was a Berlin Bank belonging to the very David Friedländer, who, in the difficult situation to find a reliable financial partner, helped Alexander von Humboldt out. “Mendelssohn and Friedländer” gave him credit for his trip and sent money to Spain without any deposits. Many years later, in 1844, it would be the partner in this banking enterprise, Joseph Mendelssohn, who bought the house in which Alexander von Humboldt lived, in order to secure his old friend a working place and space for collections. Even though they might not have been particularly excited about the destination, nor as fascinated by the Spanish literature as Weimar was, the Berliners supported the travels as worthy projects and stayed neutral. As Sara Levy finished her letter: “But just convince me of the opposite and the idea to find our friend in a lovely country will make me happy”.<sup>4</sup>

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3 Lilla Mendelssohn-Bartholdy to Henriette Mendelssohn, 22.06.1822, unpublished letters, courtesy of Thomas Lackmann, Berlin.

4 Sara Levy to Gustav von Brinckmann, 16.04.1799, unpublished letter, Brinkmanska Arkivet, Uppsala.

#### 4. Enlightenment revisited – Spain in published texts and private letters

##### 4.1 What was published

When talking about the Humboldt's travel reports on Spain or the Image of Spain in their travel reports, one must be aware that in all three cases there are no travel reports in the traditional understanding left, but the travel impressions have to be collected bit by bit from their letters, diaries and published scientific papers.

Although Goethe praised Caroline's work, and showed it to friends, he only published very few articles, much later, and only anonymously in the *Jenaische Allgemeine Zeitung* in 1809. Interestingly enough, Wilhelm von Humboldt spoke up against this procedure, especially against the anonymous print, but nothing changed (Noehles-Doerk 1996: 157). Goethe's preferences were clear, he did not chose from what Caroline had written about the Spanish School, but her texts on the Italian Masters available in Spain. Unfortunately the manuscripts, though nicely bound in leather, later got lost either among Goethe's or Humboldt's papers, and their fate is hitherto unknown. Caroline's most vivid impressions of Spain and the Spanish art can be found in letters to her father and friends.

For different reasons the Spanish impressions of the two men remained unpublished to a larger part. Wilhelm von Humboldt had planned to take the "fruits of the travel" to the press and to write a travel report: "I am seriously thinking about my travel report and looking forward to working on it" (to Gustav von Brinckmann, 20.09.1799, in Leitzmann 1939: 111, 109). The first texts Wilhelm prepared from his letter, on the mountain and cloister Montserrat and the ancient theatre in Sagunt had a small but immediate public in Weimar. The "Montserrat" was published in the Weimar Ephemeriden in 1803, the article on Sagunt appeared only posthumously. Reasons are not given why Humboldt refrained from his original plan to work out a full travelogue. He had enjoyed the idea and his friends took it for granted that it would be printed soon after his return: "He will have his Spanish Journey written and printed, some fragments of it he sent already, which are very readable" (Friedrich Schiller to Christian Körner, 03.09.1800, in Schiller 2004: 529). Interestingly enough Schiller here speaks of a "Spanish Journey" as if in comparison to the

famous Italian Journey of their common friend Goethe. It may well be that the Spanish impressions were overshadowed by Humboldt's next and most influential stay abroad: Rome.

The title of this essay, of course, refers to Humboldt's famous last work "On the Diversity of Human Language Construction and its Influence on the Mental Development of the Human Species" which deals with the Kawi languages, but it also frames Humboldt's main theory that the language of a nation is tied to its character, and this theory was mainly developed by working on the Basque language. One could, therefore, say his journey to Spain accompanied Wilhelm till the end of his life. He prepared several articles on Basque, cautiously naming them "remarks" or "samples" of a peculiar language. He planned a grammar, a history of the people in the form of a travel report and an analysis of the origin of the nation, yet the visualized monograph on the Basque language remained a fragment. His biographers see the main reason for that in his later career. After visiting Spain and Italy he was employed by the Prussian government and laid the foundation for the German University System. Again, Spain was on the margins.

As far as Alexander von Humboldt's travel reports on Spain are concerned, you might say there are none. You will find the only authorized description of his travel on the first pages of the 1st volume of his *Personal Narrative* (Humboldt/Bonpland 1972). For a person who is confronted with Humboldt's work this might be surprising because the whole outcome of his travels 1799-1804 famously consists of at least 29 huge volumes.

Humboldt himself gives two reasons for that, arguing straight as a scientist: his stay was too short and other people would know better: "I shall enter into no detail on the natural history of a country, in which I resided only six month and which has recently been examined by so many well informed travellers" (Humboldt/Bonpland 1972: 13).

The primary motive Humboldt named for publishing was to add facts to the advancement of science, not to become famous as a traveller or travel writer, which he already was before returning to Europe. The one reason why Humboldt does include some personal remarks on his way through Spain was only that an unknown falsifier had published under the name of Humboldt, which was by then famous, and had invented stories. The second and most important reason for his

remarks on Spain is apparently thankfulness. Humboldt always acted as a gentleman when foreign scientific progress was concerned and therefore named all the educated people he met, scientists as well as museum directors or captains, and included their merits. He is especially grateful to the Spanish Court: "Never had so extensive a permission been granted to any traveller, and never had any foreigner been honoured with more confidence on the part of the Spanish government" (Humboldt/Bonpland 1972: 14).

As Sandra Rebok has shown, Humboldt acted diplomatically in travelling and writing about his travel. His image of Spain has to be puzzled together from explicit and implicit statements scattered over his work. Unfiltered impressions can be found in his letters shortly before and after he left La Coruña and, as he kept in touch with many scientist he had met all his life, in later remembrances.

While Wilhelm von Humboldt filled many pages of his diary at least with contemplations about the Spanish society, its intellectual elite and institutions, the landscape as well as architecture and art, Alexander von Humboldt left no such description of his stay in Spain. The original *Spanish Diary*, which has only recently been discovered among his papers in Berlin and was published in 2007, consists mainly of statistics and geological descriptions (Leitner 2007). Humboldt never wrote diaries in the very meaning of the word, but rather collected material for later publications. Ulrike Leitner found that in this diary from the early stage of his travels his working method as "work in progress" is already to be found: a mixture of travel report, tables, drawings, measures and problems to discuss later: e.g. he wondered why "the green of the trees in Spain in general is established only three weeks earlier than in Berlin" (Leitner 2007: 21).

The Spanish diary also shows Spain as a training camp for his methods of measurements, for example, to develop a measurement for distances it was "very important to find a speed in which one walks evenly". He trained himself to walk exactly 120 steps per minute, which equalled 270 Parisian feet (Leitner 2007: 21).

Like his brother, Alexander von Humboldt used parts of his diary word for word for later publication (c. Humboldt 1825). Other parts, especially measurement data, he changed considerably, taking into account the work of colleagues.



#### 4.2 Spain and “the other”

Alexander von Humboldt’s few remarks on the nature in Spain, especially in Valencia, are quite enthusiastic. He is amazed by the five harvests a year, lives on oranges, the dreams of palm trees and the variety of plants. On the society and mentality he says, contrary to his brother, very few things, almost all positive, and his famous quote about Spain, “don’t worry, I am always amongst educated people” rather plays with the prejudices of his correspondents (to Reinhard and Christine van Haefen, 28.02.1799, in Jahn/Lange 1973: 649). His only complaint is about the uneducated people in the countryside who hinder him from taking measures.

His letters do not only contain pure enthusiasm, but also irony, e.g. about the fact that “apricots here [in Tenerife] are fed to the pigs!”, alluding to whom they are fed to in Berlin... (to Wilhelm von Humboldt, 20.-23.06.1799, in Humboldt 1999: 23).

If we ask ourselves why he dealt considerably more with Tenerife, where he only stayed for six days, it’s not only because he was extremely impressed by the Teide, but because Tenerife was where in his opinion “the Exotic” started. “I will be leaving in tears. I would have liked to settle, where I hardly left the European soil” (to Wilhelm von Humboldt, 20.-23.06.1799, in Humboldt 1999: 23). The Canaries to him were Colonies, and the Peninsula was part of the Europe he knew. Therefore he later compared the people of Tenerife with the inhabitants of the American Colonies, not with the Spanish people. Sandra Rebok has stated that, apart from the comments about Spain that can be found in his correspondence and some few short articles, Spain has generally been used in his work as a standard of comparison for natural phenomena in New Spain and the New World.

While Alexander spent many more words on the people of the Canaries – whom he considered honest, modest and religious people, with many talents and a lot of fantasy – than on the inhabitants of the Spanish mainland, Wilhelm was interested precisely in what his brother “neglected”. His letter to Friedländer can be seen as a concise introduction of Humboldts theory of the Spanish National Character; one of his main interests was the question whether the National Character of Spain differed more within the individual provinces than in France, where he saw it structured by centre and periphery.

Peter Berglar puts in the paradox:

Wilhelm von Humboldt was interested in everything, but he could only see what he wanted to find. He had no idea of [...] the greatness of the Spanish medieval monuments or the deep religious feeling (Berglar 1991: 62).

Medieval history to him was a sign of backwardness. As he put it in his letter to Friedländer, there was no better way of time travelling to the Middle Ages than going to Spain (16.12.1799, in Humboldt 1981a: 188). But this is not to be interpreted only negatively: He is positively impressed by the purity of the National Character in Spain. So the backwardness in some points makes Spain an ideal country for his research. While Alexander only compared landscapes, as “the deep vallies of Galicia, which resemble the most picturesque spots of Switzerland and the Tyrol” (Humboldt/Bonpland 1972: 17), Wilhelm contrasts Spain with Germany, if only with the southern, less cultivated or old-fashioned parts of it, and also compares the Spanish and German people.

As many other travellers in the preceding centuries, Humboldt was impressed by the independent and more liberal structures of the Basque regions (Zimmerman 1997: 251; Kürbis 2004: 170). He did not simply add to the image of the “better Spanish”, but wanted to go a step further and give a full portrait of the special characteristics of the Basque people, of their National Character. To this end he set up a series of articles and planned a book on the Basques.

All Humboldts gave credit to Spanish scholars and artists. While Alexander generally acted as a gentleman in science and named every educated person who helped him in his researches individually, such as directors of the botanical garden, scientists, private collectors etc., Wilhelm tended towards generalization. In his diary and letters he promoted the theory that the most educated people in Spain came from the middle class and were self-taught to an impressive degree, because the schools and universities were very limited.

But on the same level he is fascinated by the Castilian people, who could be called the Germans of the South, “in their mixture of Mediterranean vivacity and Nordic carefulness, open-mindedness mixed with sincerity in their work and study” (to David Friedländer, 16.12.1799, in Humboldt 1981a: 187).

Wilhelm von Humboldt called himself an interested observant, a true German, and knew that he did not mix well with others (to David Friedländer, 16.12.1799, in Humboldt 1981a: 194). In later years he should call his brother scandalously non-German, but he himself never gave up his distant position which, however, did not refrain him from passionate Spanish studies.

He, who first approached the country on a rather theoretical way, found himself surprised by its purity, language and talent for solitude (s. below).

His wife also had German experiences as measurement. Though she did not express real prejudices, she complained about the uniform clothes of the women, the seriousness of the faces, the weird way of cooking. When they had to exchange their own carriage for a mule-coach on the Spanish border, she found this way of travelling "extremely boring", but in the same letter she complimented the good roads and wonderful views. She eagerly gives credit to institutions that are "unjustly screamed about in Germany", such as the Spanish guesthouses (to Karl Friedrich von Dacheröden, 11.11.1799, in Hettler 2001: 91). Similarly, Alexander would say in a letter "How easy to forget the miserable streets and guesthouses where you can't even find bread, when you have this plant growth, this indescribable beauty of the human body" (to Karl Ludwig Wildenow, 20.04.1799, in Jahn/Lange 1973: 662).

"With my philosophical approach to food" and a practical attitude, Caroline made her stay as pleasant as possible (to Karl Friedrich von Dacheröden, 11.11.1799, in Hettler 2001: 91). As long as she could convince her servant to cook herself, she would not complain, and she always found clean beds for her family. Only when it came to art she wrote from a more emotional perspective.

Apparently all three Humboldts lowered their expectations of comfort when travelling Spain. Wilhelm von Humboldt describes a lucky situation as such: a table big enough to hold his papers, clean linen and a friendly hostess: "What more can one ask for in the middle of Spain?" (to Caroline von Humboldt, 09.05.1801, in Sydow 1907: 93). On the other hand they seem to be proud that they know and can "handle" such a country. In the letters of his 2nd trip to Spain Wilhelm von Humboldt describes himself as an expert on Spanish matters especially in comparison to his companion, the merchant Wilhelm von

Bokelmann, who cannot cope with the Spanish food or customs. Humboldt proudly reports that he is called Don Guillermo.

#### *4.3 The Montserrat as the bliss of solitude*

Unfortunately there is not much evidence on whether or rather on how the two brothers discussed Spanish impressions among themselves. It is highly probable, though, that during their common stay in Paris they discussed the political events and how they influenced their plans for travelling and for personal development. We know from Alexander that Wilhelm approved of his plan to go to Spain and “quit Europe” (Humboldt/Bonpland 1972: 9). Other than that we only have the article on the Montserrat that can be seen as an intertextual dialogue of both authors. In his own letter to Goethe, Wilhelm implemented a letter by his brother describing an incident at the hermitage, which he uses as illustration for his theory on the Spanish attitude towards solitude.

In his travelogue Alexander had only reported that from Barcelona he

made an excursion to Montserrat and the lofty peaks of which are inhabited by hermits, and where the contrast between luxuriant vegetation, and masses of naked and arid rocks, forms a landscape of a peculiar character (Humboldt/Bonpland 1972: 12).

His letters, again, reveal two sides of this traveller: his sense for exactness brings us all measurements – e.g. when he reports to Zach how he brought water to boiling temperature at different heights of the Montserrat (to Franz Xaver von Zach, 12.05.1799, in Jahn/Lange 1973: 674). But he also reports an anecdote of a muleteer and a hermit, which gives his view on wrong religiousness and true devotion:

I was with the hermit of Santiago and was looking for herbs in around his hermitage, [...] when a muleteer broke in crying and breathless. He screamed, his macho (which deriving from *masculus* means all male animals but preferably mules), his poor, dear macho fell down in the abyss. He cried as a child and prayed to Maria a thousand times. The hermit brought him quickly to his room and gave him his rosary. I was afraid this was all the help the hermit wanted to give, but no [...]. He went down fearless to the place where the mule laid. The muleteer and I could only follow slowly, the mule was hanging dangerously head down and must fall. The muleteer cried and kissed it and appealed to the saints but the hermit shouted at him this would be useless, this would be the moment to act and not to pray. He, completely unafraid of his life being

in danger, turned the mule and pulled it up. His rosary got lost in this operation, but the mule was saved. The hermit then gave the muleteer a severe lecture on his lack of determination and went home to turn himself a new rosary [...] (Humboldt 1981b: 59-93).

Despite this last sentence revealing Alexander's dry sense of humour and critical position towards religion, Wilhelm himself discussed the hermitage as positive symbol of the Spanish interpretation of worshipping.

Wilhelm von Humboldt developed his impressions of Montserrat first in a letter to Goethe, which was published later. Also in his essay one can both note the disciplined reporting of an experienced if not enlightened traveller, giving the hours of the journeys, the height of the mountain and climate notes as well as the history of the church up there, but also the intellectual dedication to Goethe and his works. He saves himself the trouble of describing the landscape in details by referring to the travel report by Fischer. His climb is in itself very romantic, "while ascending one always has the summit of the mountain on one's left and at the same time the abyss on one's right" (Humboldt 1981b: 62-64), but he only gets passionate when describing the inhabitants of the hermit cells. He climbs first to the cloister, then to the hermits and contrasts the religious life in a cloister with the individual devotion of a hermitage, which is not only above the cloister geographically but also in Humboldts mind "in the truest sense of the word floating in the air"; he is impressed by their simple life and especially by the withdrawal from the world, the SOLITUDE (Humboldt 1981b: 90).

He cannot, this being also typical for Wilhelm von Humboldt, refrain from telling some erotic legends related to the Montserrat that, he thinks, would not be found in other travel reports. At this point it must be said that Humboldt, though dealing with enlightenment and religion a lot, does nowhere ridicule Spain as country of Inquisition and Catholicism. He often comments on the exotic beauty of the Spanish women and was only slightly amused about the prudery of the Spanish people: "Imagine, my dearest friend, they even planned to hide away beautiful paintings by Rubens, by Tizian and Guido Reni in dark chambers, because they are considered indecent!" (to Goethe 28.11.1799, in Bratranek 1876: 149).

Confronted with individual hermits, Humboldt could sometimes also not refrain from shock, but still compares the life of hermits to saints as well as primitive wilderness. Here again one finds some remarks on the Spanish human beings, who to him are less cultivated than the northerners, but also less interested in material things, they appear as purer and more sensual beings (Humboldt 1981b: 88).

For our soldier Schwartz, who could just march under the Montserrat, there was only one opportunity to compare Spain with Berlin. The river here was “not as big as our Spree [...]” (Schwartz 1921: 57, fn 1).

Though his description did not become part of a proper travel report, Humboldt’s impressions of the Montserrat made their way into German Classical Canon.

Friedrich Schiller exclaimed that the Montserrat would draw human beings from the outer world into the inner world, and Goethe said “A man can never find peace, only in his inner Montserrat”. The internal Montserrat became a common phrase if not a proverb in Weimar (Humboldt 1981a: 629). It is also said in German literature history that Humboldt’s epistolary essay as it was influenced Goethe when writing the second part of *Faust* (Krumpelmann 1926). The image of this Spanish mountain accompanied Humboldt to the end of his lifetime. Shortly before his death Wilhelm von Humboldt told a friend that whenever he enjoyed solitude he thought of his favourite place, the Montserrat (to Charlotte Diede, 04.11.1833, in Humboldt 1909: 319-320).

## 5. Conclusion

One might say that to the cosmopolitan Alexander von Humboldt Europe, including Spain, was home. He conversed in Madrid, as he had done in Berlin, scientifically with scholars and diplomatically at the Court. He saw Spain as last “stop” before the New World and his expedition really got started in the Canaries. To him America was “the other” (with Tenerife as borderline), while to Wilhelm “the other” lay right on the other side of the French border and was to be found in the Spanish temperament or National Character. The Spanish National Character, and especially the Basque, seemed to Wilhelm von Hum-

boldt less cultivated than the Italian or the north German, but intriguing for lifelong research.

Wilhelm and Caroline von Humboldt have often been said to act as representatives of a "Weimar attitude", but this is not all there is to say. Comparing Wilhelm's correspondences with different friends, it becomes clear that with each one he discusses his or her favourite topic: Arts with Goethe, lyrics and sociability with Brinckmann and Enlightenment with Friedländer. In all areas he comes to the conclusion that the very backwardness of the Spanish society in some areas makes it a very promising country for studying its *Eigenthümlichkeit* and developing his concept of the National Character.

Wilhelm and Caroline's attitude towards Spain and especially the Spanish art changed while travelling the country. As Gisela Noehles-Doerk has shown, the writings of both Wilhelm and Caroline could have modified the general impression of Spanish arts in Germany quite a bit, but their potential influence was hindered by selective publication and loss of material. This loss is even more regrettable, as we might have learnt how the personal confrontation with the Spanish art modified the concept of a person who grew up with Italian Classics as artistic norm.

Though their interest in the country was mainly developed while travelling, it can be said that with their – compared to contemporaries and friends – relative open-mindedness towards a forgotten country, their interest in its characteristics and treasures and the methods applied all three Humboldts set standards in scientific travelling and in travelling to Spain. Their writings present Spain as the interesting other, neither romanticized nor neglectable.

Travelling to Spain had broadened their view of the world. Although in Paris Wilhelm von Humboldt had called himself a proper German and had always wanted to return to Berlin, the Spanish Journey changed his attitude. When they returned from Spain, they first went to Weimar, then to Tegel and Berlin, but the freshly made cosmopolitans found the city and the German literature rather dull and they decided to go down south again.

Only the brave soldier, returning from nine years abroad, returned for good. And he told his adventures of this exotic country in the bars of Berlin till the end of his life.

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